

There are countless **different ways of speaking**.

Sometimes, we express ourselves by speaking quietly, loudly, angrily, unclearly or enthusiastically.

And sometimes, we can express ourselves really well without using any words at all — just sounds.

When we describe what someone said, of course we can say, “**He said ...**” or “**She said ...**”

But there **are so many alternatives to “say”** that describe the many **different WAYS of speaking**.

Here are some of the most common ones.

Words for talking loudly in English

Shout / Yell / Scream

Sometimes you just need to say something LOUDLY!

Maybe you’re shouting at your kids to get off the climbing frame and come inside before the storm starts.

Or perhaps you’re just one of those people who just shout a lot of the time when you speak. And that’s fine. I’ve got a friend like that. He says it’s because he’s the youngest kid in a family full of brothers and sisters — he had to shout to make sure people heard him. And he still **shouts**.

Yelling is a bit different. When you yell, you’re probably angry or surprised or even in pain. Yelling is a bit shorter and more “in-the-moment.”

Screaming is similar but usually higher in pitch and full of fear or pain or total fury, like when you’ve just seen a ghost or when you’ve dropped a box of bricks on your foot.

Comic-style drawing of a man who has just dropped a brick on his foot. He's screaming and "Argh!" is written in large black letters.

“Stop **yelling at** me! I’m sorry! I made a mistake, but there’s no need to **shout!**”

Bark / Bellow / Roar

When I hear these words, I always imagine something like this:

Text: Bark, bellow, roar / Image: Aggressive man shouting at two boys on a football field

These verbs all feel rather **masculine**, and you imagine them in a deep voice.

I always think of an army general walking around the room telling people what to do.

That’s probably why we have the phrase “to **bark** orders at someone,” which means to tell people what to do in an authoritative, loud and aggressive way.

“I can’t stand that William guy. He’s always **barking** orders at everyone!”

Shriek / Squeal / Screech

Oooooohhh These do not sound nice.

These are the sounds of a car stopping suddenly.

Or the sound a cat makes when you tread on her tail.

Or very overexcited kids at a birthday party after eating too much sugar.

These verbs are high pitched and sometimes painful to hear.

“When I heard her **shriek**, I ran to the kitchen to see what it was. Turned out it was just a mouse.”

“As soon as she opened the box and saw the present, she let out a **squeal** of delight!”

Wail

Wailing is also high pitched, but not so full of energy.

It's usually full of sadness or even anger.

When I think of someone wailing, I imagine someone completely devastated — **very sad** — after losing someone they love.

You get a lot of **wailing** at funerals.

“It's such a mess!” she **wailed** desperately. “It'll take ages to clear up!”

Words for speaking quietly in English

When we talk about people speaking in quiet ways, for some reason, we often use words that we also use for animals. In a way, this is useful, because we can immediately get a feel for the sound of the word.

Hiss

This is the sound that **snakes** make.

Sometimes you want to be both quiet AND angry.

Maybe someone in the theatre is talking and you can't hear what Hamlet's saying, so you **hiss at** them to shut up.

Or maybe you're hanging out with Barry and Naomi when Barry starts talking about Naomi's husband, who she split up with last week. Then you might want to **hiss** this information to Barry so that Naomi doesn't hear.

But Naomi wasn't listening anyway — she was miles away staring into the distance.

“You'll regret this!” he **hissed**, pointing his finger in my face.

Whimper

To be fair, this one's a little complicated. **Whimpering** is a kind of **traumatised, uncomfortable** sound.

If you think of a frightened animal, you might hear it make **some kind of quiet, weak sound** that shows it's in pain or unhappy. Or if you think of a kid who's just been told she can't have an ice cream. Those sounds might be **whimpers**.

"Please! Don't shoot me!" he **whimpered**, shielding his head with his arms.

Whisper

Two school students in a classroom **whispering** to each other with the text "gossip" repeated in a vertical column

Whispering is when you speak, but you bypass your vocal cords so that your words sound like wind.

In a way, it's like you're speaking air. Which is a pretty cool way to look at it. This is a really useful way of speaking if you're into gossiping. "Hey! What are you **whispering about**? Come on! Tell us! We'll have no secrets here!"

Words for speaking negatively in English

Rant

Ranting means **to speak at length** about a particular topic.

However, there's a bit more to it than that. Ranting is lively, **full of passion** and usually about something important — at least important to the person speaking. Sometimes it's even quite angry. Grrrr. We probably see **rants** most commonly **on social media** — especially by PEOPLE WHO LOVE USING CAPS LOCK AND LOTS OF EXCLAMATION MARKS!!!!!!

Ranting always **sounds a little mad**, whether you're ranting about something reasonable, like the fact that there's too much traffic in the city, or whether you're ranting about something weird, like why the world is going to hell and it's all because of people who like owning small, brown dogs. Mad! "I tried to talk to George, but he just **started ranting about** the tax hike."

"Did you see Jemima's most recent Facebook **rant**? All about how squirrels are trying to influence the election results with memes about Macaulay Culkin."

Babble / Blabber / Blather / Drone / Prattle / Ramble

Woman saying, "Blah blah blether drone ramble blah blah." Two other people are standing nearby looking bored. These words all have very similar meanings.

First of all, when someone **babbles** (or blabbers or blathers or drones or prattles or rambles), it means they are **talking for a long time**. Too long. And probably not letting other people speak. And, importantly, about nothing particularly interesting or important. You know the type of person, right? You run into a friend or someone you know. All you do is ask, "How's life?" and five minutes later, you're still listening to them talking about their dog's toilet problems. They just **ramble on** about it for ages. These verbs **are often used with the preposition "on."** That's because "on" often means "continuously" in phrasal verbs.

So when someone "**drones on**," it means they just talk for ages about nothing in particular.

"You're meeting Aunt Thelma this evening? Oh, good luck! Have fun listening to her **drone on and on** about her horses."

Groan / Grumble / Moan

These words simply mean "**complain**."

There are some small differences, though. When you **groan**, you probably don't even say any words. Instead, you just complain with a sound. When you **grumble**, you complain in a sort of angry or impatient way. It's not a good way to get people to like you. Finally, **moaning** is complaining, but without much direction. You know the feeling, right? Things are unfair, and stuff isn't working, and it's all making life more difficult than it should be. We might not plan to do anything about it, but it definitely does feel good to just ... **complain about** it. Just to express your frustration about how unfair it all is and how you've been victimised and how you should be CEO by now and how you don't get the respect you deserve and ... Well, you get the idea. If you're frustrated with things, maybe you just need to find a sympathetic ear and **have a good moan**. "Pietor? He's nice, but he does tend to **grumble about** the local kids playing football on the street."

Words for speaking unclearly in English

Mumble / Murmur / Mutter

These verbs are all very similar and describe **speaking in a low and unclear way**, almost like you're speaking to yourself. Have you ever been on the metro or the bus and seen someone in the corner just sitting and talking quietly and a little madly to themselves? That's **mumbling** (or murmuring or muttering). What's the difference? Good question! The differences are just in what type of quiet and unclear speaking you're doing. When someone's **mumbling**, it means they're **difficult to understand**. You might want to ask them to speak more clearly. **Murmuring** is more neutral. It **might be someone praying** quietly to themselves, or you might even hear the murmur of voices behind a closed door. Finally, **muttering** is usually quite passive-aggressive and has a **feeling of complaining** to it. "I could hear him **muttering** under his breath after his mum told him off."

Slur

Drunk-looking man in a pub holding a bottle and speaking nonsense. How can you tell if someone's been drinking too much booze (alcohol)? Well, apart from the fact that they're in the middle of trying to climb the traffic lights holding a traffic cone and wearing grass on their head, they're also **slurring** — their **words are all sort of sliding into each other**. This can also happen if you're super tired. "Get some sleep! You're **slurring** your words."

Stammer / Stutter

Th-th-th-this is wh-wh-when you try to g-g-g-get the words ou-ou-out, but it's dif-dif-dif-difficu-... hard. For some people, **this is a speech disorder**, and the person who's doing it can't help it. If you've seen the 2010 film *The King's Speech*, you'll know what I'm talking about. This **can also happen when you're frightened or angry or really, really excited** — and especially when you're **nervous**. That's when you **stammer** your words. "No ... I mean, yeah ... I mean no..." Wendy **stammered**.

Other words for speaking in English

Drawl

If you **drawl** (or if you have a drawl), you **speak in a slow way**, maaakiing the voowweel sounds loooongeer than normaal. Some people think this sounds lazy, but I think it sounds kind of nice and relaxed. Some regional accents, like Texan and some Australian accents, have a **drawl** to them. "He was the first US President who spoke with that Texan **drawl**." "Welcome to cowboy country," he **drawled**.

Growl

Grrrrrrrrrrrr! That's my impression of a dog there. I was **growling**. If you ever go cycling around remote Bulgarian villages, then you're probably quite familiar with this sound. There are dogs everywhere, and sometimes they just **bark**. But sometimes, **before barking, they growl** — they make that **low, threatening, throaty sound**. And it means "stay away." But **people can growl**, too, especially if they want to be threatening. "'Stay away from my family!' he **growled**."

Using speaking verbs as nouns

We can use these speaking verbs in the same way we use "say." For example, if someone says "Get out!" loudly, we can say: "'Get out!' he **shouted**." However, most of the verbs we looked at today are also used as nouns. (You might have noticed in some of the examples.) For example, if we want to focus on the fact that he was angry when he shouted, and not the words he used, we can say: "He gave **a shout of anger**." We can use these nouns with various verbs, usually "give" or "let out." "She gave **a shout of surprise**."

"He let out **a bellow of laughter**." "I heard **a faint murmur** through the door."

There you have it: 30 alternatives to "say."

So next time you're describing your favourite TV show or talking about the dramatic argument you saw the other day, you'll be able to describe it more colourfully and expressively.